

Future of Work Symposium

U.S. Department of Labor

December 10, 2015

FUTURE OF WORK

Change and Innovation

Our economy is undergoing tremendous change and innovation, and shifts in the nature of work are creating both opportunities and challenges. In recent decades, a growing number of stable employment relationships have given way to something more arms-length – from contract situations to temporary employment to one-off job opportunities, or “gigs” – arising from subcontracting, outsourcing, and other forms of “fissuring.”

Technological change is driving some of these developments, but these broad workplace trends are unfolding across both high- and low-tech sectors. Because they are taking place in many traditional sectors of the economy – hospitality, manufacturing, healthcare, etc. – as well as emerging sectors, they are already affecting a broad swath of the working population.

For some workers, changing work arrangements empower them to create value in new ways. And evolving technology and changing business models can improve capacity to respond to changing trends and consumer demand more quickly and efficiently. Yet they can do so by fostering tenuous relationships between workers and businesses, shifting economic risk onto workers and their families.

Our Continuing Mission

Our mission at the department of Labor applies to the world of work, whatever forms it may take. As work changes, we need to make sure we keep pace. That is why on Thursday, December 10, we will convene business leaders, academics, workers and worker advocates, philanthropic leaders, technology developers

and other leading thinkers to explore what these trends in the nature of work arrangements mean for the department’s core work in the future.

- How do we adapt department programs to train workers for a changing labor market?
- What do changing work arrangements mean for access to benefit programs that the department administers and safeguards, like retirement savings, unemployment insurance and others?
- How do we ensure that enforcement of core worker protections within the department’s jurisdiction remains effective while allowing for, and encouraging, innovation?
- How do we make it easier for new-model companies to do right by workers?



Throughout these discussions, we are committed to rejecting false choices between innovation and basic labor standards, between profitability and security for workers. As President Obama said at the recent White House Summit on Worker Voice, changes in the economy have the potential to create “... new flexibility, autonomy and opportunity for workers. We’ve just got to make sure that as we continue to move forward, both in this ‘on demand’ economy and the economy as a whole, hard work guarantees some security as well.”

#FutureOfWork



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
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